

Doc Taylor Place
On the East Fork of Armells Creek
Southwest of Colstrip $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles
Town of Colstrip
Rosebud County
Montana

HABS No. MT-82

HABS
MONT
44-COLS.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

Location: North side of East Fork Armells Creek, 1/5 mile east of the Armells Creek road, approximately 3 1/2 miles southwest from Colstrip, Colstrip Vicinity, Rosebud County, Montana [NE1/4 NW1/4 SW1/4 & SE1/4 SW1/4 NW1/4 Section 12, T1N, R40E]

Quad: USGS Colstrip, SW, Mont. - 1971

UTM: 13/5078900/367450

Present Owner: Rosebud County, Montana

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Statement of Significance: The Doc Taylor Place is an example of homesteading patterns in southeastern Montana during the early twentieth century. The ranch's log cabin also shows a rare example of the use of scarfing, a technique where short logs were joined together by a slanted, interlocking joint. The technique was an efficient way to utilize timber resources in an area where large trees were scarce. Its actual use, however, was infrequent.

Historians: Paul Anderson and Lynn Fredlund
GCM Services, Inc.
Butte, Montana 59701

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection: ca. 1913

Historical Narrative:

The land along the West Fork of Armells Creek was first occupied by whites when the cattlemen of the Green Mountain Stock Ranching Company moved into the area around 1883. The Green Mountain company was one of numerous companies which took advantage of the seemingly unlimited open range of southeast Montana during the 1870s and 1880s, which by this point had been cleared of Indians and buffalo. The Green Mountain Stock Ranching Company (also called the "UF" after the brand used by the outfit) was financed primarily by Vermont investors (as the name "Green Mountain" would indicate). The company's home ranch was located on the south shore of the Yellowstone River, across from the mouth of the Big Porcupine Creek but it maintained many camps over its range which included a vast area between the Crow Reservation to the west and Rosebud Creek to the east. Thousands of cattle were run on the open range and the company prospered during the boom times of the early 1880s. But like so many other cattle companies, the Green Mountain company was not able to survive the disastrous winter of 1886-87 which killed almost three quarters of the cattle in Montana and spelled the beginning of the end of the open range cattle industry. The UF sold out to the Fletcher Brothers who continued ranching in the area, primarily raising horses, for another 25 years.¹

Ultimately, the dominance of the open range cattle companies, such as the UF, was ended by the influx of thousands of homesteaders who swarmed into the region during the first decades of the twentieth century. The open range was rapidly settled, fenced and the most desirable tracts of land were patented. The homesteading movement came late to southeastern Montana due to a unique combination of circumstances. The best lands to the east had already been settled and Montana was one of the last frontiers where large tracts of land were still available. The period had above average rainfall, obscuring the fact that the region was essentially an arid, semi-desert. Dry-land farming techniques were being promoted as the way to farm marginal areas west of the 100th meridian and the homesteading fever was further stimulated by the steady rise of wheat prices throughout the period, culminating in the skyrocketing demand for wheat following the outbreak of World War I. Railroads and local boosters joined in the promotional efforts with extravagant hyperbole, extolling the region as a virtual garden of Eden. The Northern Pacific, which had extensive holdings along the Yellowstone Valley, touted the lands of southeastern Montana, as did the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific when it laid tracks through Rosebud County in 1908 and 1909. The unscrupulous boosterism was due to the railroad's need to build a base for traffic on their lines and to create a market for lands they owned.² Thus, the unusually wet climate of the period, the high prices offered for wheat, the availability of cheap land and the persuasive promotional campaign all conspired to lure homesteaders to the area in the belief they could easily acquire land and make a good living on their own farm. And for a brief period after the turn of the century, this dream appeared to be within reach.

The homesteading boom in the Colstrip area was further encouraged by changes in the land laws. Originally, the first settlers in Montana filed for land under the Preemption Law of 1841 which allowed a person to buy 160 acres of unsurveyed land at \$1.25 per acre. The Homestead Act of

1862 made it possible to acquire 160 acres by living on it and working at least part of it for five years with a \$25 filing fee being the only financial requirement. It soon became evident that 160 acres were, in most cases, not sufficient to support a family in the arid regions of southeastern Montana. Additional acreage could be obtained under the Timber Culture Act of 1873 which allowed a settler to acquire 40 acres if he planted trees on two and one-half acres. The Desert Land Act of 1877 made it possible for the homesteader to file on 640 acres for 25 cents an acre and then pay \$1.00 per acre after three years if he built dams and ditches for irrigation. The land law that probably contributed most to the eastern Montana farming boom was the 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act (amended in 1912), making it possible for a settler to acquire 320 acres by working the homestead for three years.³ Most of the homesteads in the Armells Creek area were established under the Enlarged Homestead Act and the Doc Taylor ranch is one such example.

The Colstrip area experienced much the same settlement patterns during this period as did the region as a whole. By 1910 enough homesteaders had settled in the upper Armells Creek drainage to justify the establishment of a fourth-class post office at Castle Rock. In the summer of 1911 the Rea Sheep Company sold off its Cold Springs Ranch holdings to dry-land farmers which drew in more settlers to the area.⁴

The Taylor ranch, located along the north bank of the East Fork of Armells Creek, was first settled by William "Bill" Cooley in 1912. Cooley, who was of Dutch descent, was from Oceola, Iowa but had moved to Dayton, Wyoming before settling in southeast Montana. The following year, Cooley returned to Wyoming to bring his family and possessions to Montana.⁵ While Cooley was in Wyoming, two brothers - "Harry" (Abraham L.) and "Doc" (Levi) Taylor - took over the ranch. This arrangement was apparently mutually agreed upon by Cooley and the Taylors (who were also originally from the Oceola, Iowa area and presumably knew the Cooleys). After Cooley returned from Wyoming, he moved his family to a new homestead a few miles to the northwest of the original Armells Creek ranch.⁶

The Taylors (who were of English or Scottish descent) moved from Bazile Mills, Nebraska, to southeast Montana in 1906 and initially lived on the W. W. "Dogie" MacDonald ranch on Rosebud Creek. On September 10, 1917 Doc Taylor obtained a homestead patent (#599578) for 311 acres in the southwest quarter of Section 12. Another 160 acres in the northwest quarter of Section 12 were added to the ranch under his wife's name on February 2, 1920 when a homestead patent (#751623) was granted to Mary Taylor.⁷ This practice of augmenting the size of a farm or ranch by patenting additional acreage under various family member names was common throughout the area since even the Enlarged Homestead Act's 320 acres were usually not enough to support a family in the Armells Creek area. The area is typical of southeastern Montana in general where much of the land is covered by scrub pine forest, sandstone outcrops or low hills and is unsuited for farming. Even in the areas that are suitable for grazing or raising crops, vegetation is sparse since the area averages less than 14 inches of rainfall annually [15 inches is generally considered the minimum needed for dry-land farming].

A few year after moving onto the Armells Creek ranch, Harry Taylor set up his own adjoining homestead. He obtained a patent on 320 acres in north half of Section 14 (Pat. #637022) on June 18, 1918 and two years later, on May 27, 1920, he added an additional 151 acres in the northeast quarter of Section 12 (Pat. #751625).⁸ Doc Taylor, his wife and their five children (Linc, Harry, Mary, Alice and Grace), remained at the original Cooley homestead. Doc Taylor both farmed and ran cattle on the homestead. In spite of the nickname "Doc", Taylor apparently did not have any

professional training as a doctor and never worked in any medical capacity. He did, however, have a somewhat unusual part-time occupation serving as a guide for prospectors who were looking for possible coal mine sites in the area.⁹

In August of 1921, Doc Taylor died and the operation of the ranch was taken over by his wife and one of his sons, Linc Taylor and his wife, Bess Anshutz. Although the original log house was abandoned during the 1930s, the ranch stayed in the family until 1944 when it was sold to A. L. "Leo" Farley (who was a nephew of Bill Cooley). Mary Taylor moved to Cody, Wyoming where she died in 1956 while Linc and Bess moved to Miles City and continued ranching until Linc's death in 1954.¹⁰

The Armells Creek ranch was owned by Leo Farley until 1952 and then it was held by either the Armells Land and Cattle Company (from 1952 to 1967 and again from 1985 to 1988) or Farley's, Inc. (from 1968 to 1984). Although the name of the corporation changed (apparently because of failures to pay state corporate license fees) the control of the ranching company remained in the hands of the Farleys with Leo Farley as president, Beulah Farley as secretary, and Leo's son James Burton Farley, along with Myrna Farley Cambill and Curtis Farley Cambill serving on the board of directors. During this period of corporate ownership the Farleys acquired sizeable landholdings throughout southeast Montana which they ran from the ranch headquarters on Armells Creek. In 1985 Beulah Farley became president of the corporation after Leo's death and remained in control of the corporation until 1988. At this point the property where the original Doc Taylor homestead was located, was acquired by the Booth Bros. Land and Livestock Company. A few months later, it was transferred to Rosebud County for use as the site of a new airport.¹¹

The Taylor ranch was similar to many of the other homesteads in the area, many of which were settled in the period just prior to World War I under the Enlarged Homestead Act. The enlargement of the homestead with additional patents under other family members names was a common practice, as was the ranch's mixed system of growing crops and running cattle. Most homesteaders, like Taylor, also worked at non-agricultural odd jobs in order to hold on to their property.

The Doc Taylor place was not a typical homestead in the simple fact that it beat the odds and managed to survive the prolonged depression in the agricultural economy during the 1920s and 1930s. Many homesteaders were deluded into believing the initial period of wet weather and high prices were the norm when, in fact, it was a very atypical situation. Following World War I, prices fell catastrophically and the region's normal arid weather cycles returned. By the mid-1920s some 20,000 homesteads in Montana were foreclosed. The decline continued during the late 1920s and then became an avalanche of disaster during the drought and depression of the 1930s. By the time the agricultural economy began to recover in the 1940s, one out of two homesteads in Montana had failed.

Some of the survivors of this grim period were able to buy up failed homesteads and consolidate their widespread holdings under corporate ownership. The period following World War II has been characterized by this consolidation of family holdings into larger corporate units. Leo Farley was an example of this pattern as he acquired numerous properties in southeastern Montana, including the Doc Taylor ranch. The ranch continued to function as a mixed cattle and farming operation into the post-World War II era but as just one relatively minor component of the Farley family corporation, whether under the name of the Armells Land and Cattle Company or Farley's

Inc. The Doc Taylor ranch is an example of the changes which have occurred in the farming and ranching economy of southeastern Montana, spanning over three-quarters of century from the original small family homestead to its final stage as one small component of a modern corporate agri-business.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The remains of the homestead consists of a log house, a frame construction barn, the remnant of a root cellar, a wooden windmill, and a faint remnant of the foundation of the cabin built by William Cooley.

The log house was probably constructed by the Taylors around 1913. It measures 19 x 33 feet. The logs were slabbed on the inside and outside walls while bark was left on the round. Half dovetail notching was used at the corners while the side walls show occasional use of a technique called scarfing, where a slanted, interlocking joint made it possible to join short logs for use in longer walls.¹² The technique was useful in an area where timber is scarce and long logs were hard to come by, although its actual use was comparatively rare. Mortar was used to chink the cracks between the logs. The structure's gable roof is supported by four purlins and an unusual double-log ridge pole. The roof had boards overlaid with tar paper and then covered with sod. The house interior had no covering on the walls other than paint.

The Taylors had been living in the original Cooley cabin while building the log house. After finishing the new log house, they moved the Cooley cabin and converted it into an additional room on the house's east side. This addition was apparently added soon after the family moved into the new place, as indicated by the fact that the house logs covered by the addition are only slightly weathered. The addition consisted of whole logs with saddle notching and mortar chinking. Sometime later, a frame storage room was built on the east wall to the north of the first addition.

After the home was abandoned in the 1930s, a large stock door was cut in the east wall so the structure could serve as a stock barn which has been its function since then.

The barn, which is located about 125 feet to the north of the house, is a board and batten frame construction with a wood shingle-covered gable roof. The barn measures 30 x 45 feet. Three double-wide bay doors open on the east side. A door on the upper level opens on the south side and was reached by an outside stairway. A 25 x 37 feet shed-roofed addition is on the barn's west side. The use of planed lumber in construction of the addition indicates it was probably constructed sometime after the barn which was built using unplanned boards.

A few feet from the north side of the house there is the remnant of what was originally a log dugout. Only a trash-filled depression remains of the dugout.

About 30 feet south west of the house there is a rectangular mound of dirt which is probably the location of the original cabin built by Bill Cooley.

One hundred feet east of the house is a small (approximately 15 feet high) wooden windmill. This is a relatively rare example of a surviving wood framework windmill although the radial vanes, tailpiece and pump mechanism have been removed.

Another barn once was located southeast of the house near the banks of Armells Creek but it burned down some years ago and no trace of it remains.¹³

FOOTNOTES

¹Joann Stephan, ""Upper Armells Creek in the History of Southcentral Montana," In "Western Energy Company Archaeological Investigations, Rosebud County, Montana 1973," by Lynn B. and Dale E. Fredlund (Unpublished report prepared for the Western Engergy Company, Butte, Montana by the Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology Foundation, Minerals Research Center, Butte, 1974), 52-54.

²K. Ross Toole, Montana: An Uncommon Land (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 235.

³Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder, Montana: A History of Two Centuries (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 182-183.

⁴Forsyth Times-Journal, 24 August 1911.

⁵Rosebud County Bicentennial Committee, They Came and Stayed: Rosebud County History (Billings, Montana: Western Printing and Lithography, 1977), 308.

⁶Mr. and Mrs. Burton Farley, Interviewed by Lynn Fredlund, 28 June 1973, south of Colstrip, Montana, notes, GCM Services, Inc., Butte, Montana.

⁷Homestead Patent Records (Pat. #599578 and #751623), United States Bureau of Land Management Office, Billings, Montana.

⁸Homestead Patent Records (Pat. #637022 and #751625), United States Bureau of Land Management Office, Billings, Montana.

⁹Rosebud County, They Came, 308.

¹⁰Ibid.

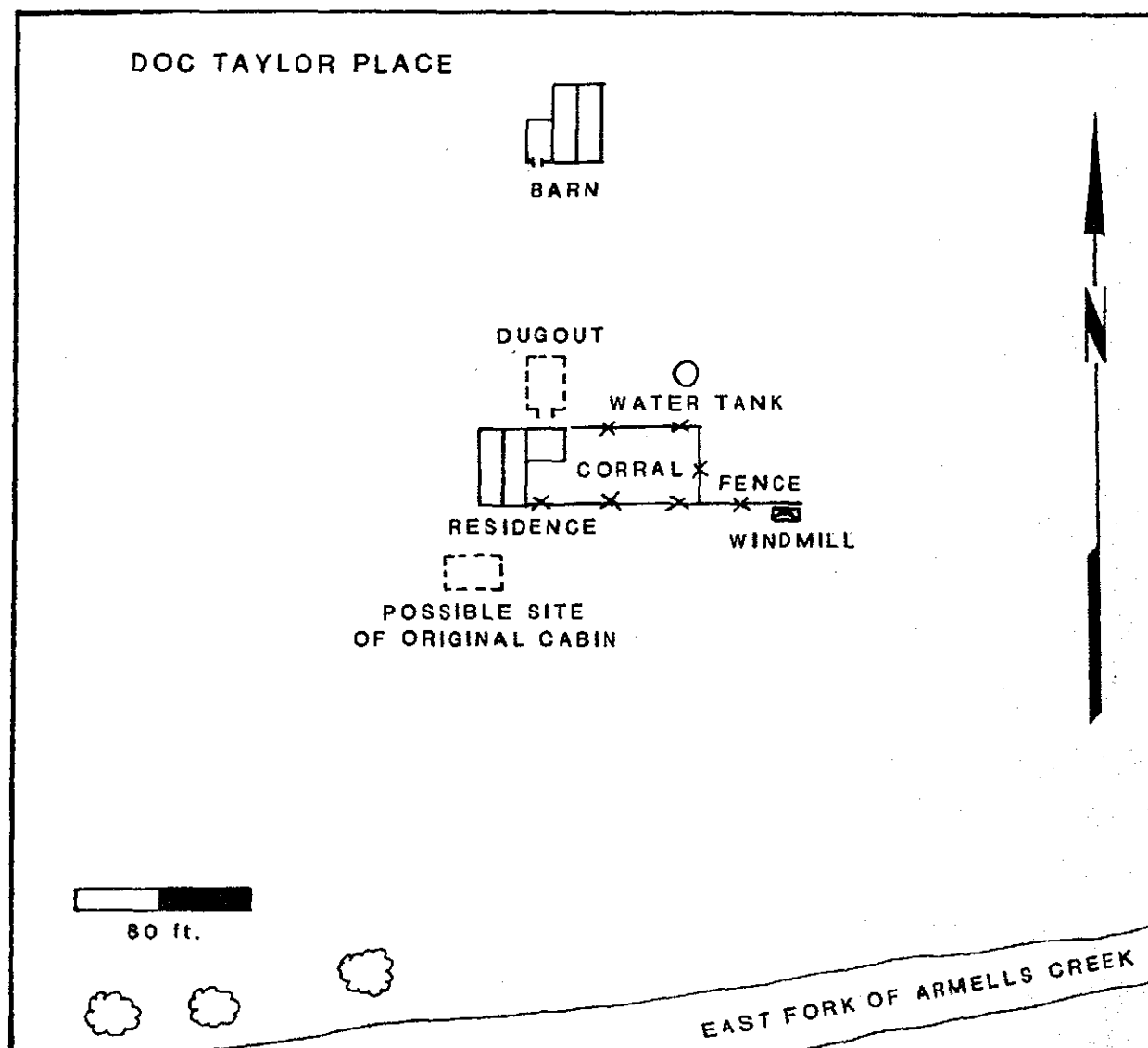
¹¹Property Records, Assessor's Office, Rosebud County, Montana, Rosebud County Courthouse, Forsyth, Montana.

¹²F. Kniffen, "On Corner Timbering." Pioneer America 1 (January 1969): 1-8.

¹³Thamer Decker, Interview by Lynn Fredlund, 1 July 1973, south of Colstrip, Montana, notes, GCM Services, Inc., Butte, Montana.

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- Sloane, Eric. An Age of Barns. New York: Funk and Wagnell, 1954.
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- Toole, K. Ross. Montana: An Uncommon Land. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959.
- Trewartha, G. "Some Regional Characteristics of American Farmsteads." Annals of American Geographers 38 (1948): 169-225.
- United States Bureau of Land Management, Homestead patent records (Patent Nos. 599578, 751623, 751625, 637022), Bureau of Land Management Billings Office, Billings, Montana.



Sketch map of the Doc Taylor Place.